

P.G. Sem. II Unit - I
Cognitive Psy.
Nature of Attention

Determinants

Q. What is attention and explain the different kinds of attention.

Ans. According to Woodworth: -

"Attention is to attend, and to attend is to get a set or state of readiness to perceive a certain object or to perform a certain act".

Another simple definition of attention is "Attention is a selective mental process through which we bring the selected stimulus in the focus of our consciousness."

"Attention is the selective activity of the consciousness."

Attention is a selective process.

Man lives in an environment. The stimuli from the environment are always affecting him. But these stimuli do not affect him equally. It is a common observation that some stimuli affect us more than others.

This shows that man selects out of environmental stimuli. The tendency of selection shows that there is a motivational process in him which is known as attention.

This attention is affected by interest, attitudes and set. It is a selective process which includes motivation, set and selection.

Characteristics of attention.

① Selective nature: - All attention has this selective quality about it. There are lots of stimulus in the environment and one cannot pay attention to all of them. He has to select and choose only one stimulus to pay attention. For example; if we go

to the market with the intention of buying clothes, then ~~all~~ our attention is restricted to the cloth's shop only. We do not pay attention to the shoes shop or the grocers shop in the market.

② Limited span or range: - One cannot pay attention to an endless number of things at a time. A teacher cannot go on teaching endlessly. Number of things a person can see at a time is limited. While paying attention we select the stimulus. The number of stimulus which a person brings in his consciousness at a time is called span of attention. Different stimulus has different span of attention. Span of attention is measured by a special machine called the "Tachistoscope."

③ Fluctuation of attention: - Fluctuation of attention is also called shifting of attention. One can never pay attention to something all the time even if one wants to. Even for a moment mind (attention) fluctuates. Attention gets fluctuated from one stimulus to the other, from the second to the third and so on.

④ Aim or purpose: - Every attention has a purpose. Attention is purposive or purposeful. Each attention has some goal or the other. Attention is backed by desire. A person at a certain time pays attention on the thing of which he has the desire or need at that particular moment. Generally a hungry man's attention goes on food and a thirsty man's on water.

⑤ Readiness: - Attention makes a person ready for reactions. We react after paying attention on a thing or after having full knowledge of the conditions. It happens so because by paying attention it becomes clear.

⑥ Bodily adjustments: - Bodily adjustments also happen in attention. While paying attention a person is in certain gesture, so that seeing the person at once we know that a person is paying attention to something.

Kinds of Attention.

Attention is of three kinds;

- ① Voluntary attention;
- ② Involuntary attention; and,
- ③ Habitual attention.

Voluntary attention: - Voluntary attention as the name itself is indicative of its nature is that attention which is willingly directed to an object. If, for example, a student attends to his studies of his own account and as a result, ^{not by} any external pressure, his attention will be called voluntary attention. An analysis reveals elements of desires and interest, aim and social adjustment in the voluntary attention. In the foregoing ~~attention~~ example the student directs his attention because of particular aim like passing the examination or acquiring knowledge, he may be able to support a family or gain social standing or status. Like other activities, attention is just

another form of adjustment. The difference between voluntary and involuntary attention is that while the former is secured by the motivating elements in the individual, the motivating elements exist without it in the latter case. Apart from the wish and aim of the person, factors like interest in the object and social balance also work in voluntary attention.

② Involuntary attention: - When the attention of a person is drawn over a stimulus or stimuli then such attention is called involuntary attention. Any extra efforts are not made for such type of attention. But this does not mean that person's attention goes contrary to his interest. It is seen that the person has no aim in such type of attention. Such sort of attention takes place due to the characteristics of the stimulus, this is also known as spontaneous attention. For example our attention is automatically drawn to sudden loud noise, strong light, ^{and to} Sweet music, due to the characteristics of the stimulus. The person is made helpless in such type of attention and his attention is automatically drawn towards the stimulus.

③ Habitual attention: - When the attention of a person is drawn towards a stimulus due to his interests and predetermined concepts for the stimulus, then such type of attention is called habitual attention.

Such sort of attention is neither instigated by his wishes nor by external situations and stimulations. The interests and motives of every man in society are quite different from the other, hence individual difference is found in such type of behaviour. For example, the attention of a musician is drawn towards music. If a person is in the habit of reading newspaper at morning tea then his attention is drawn towards the newspaper during morning tea. This is habitual attention.

Actually, the above distinctions made in attention are not very clear. No attention can be said to belong to any one of the three types completely. A scholar has to exercise his desire in spite of his involuntary attention in reading. In this way the difference in the types of attention is small though it is of great importance from the psychological view-point.

Vol. Attention - Attention which is willingly directed towards the object (stimulus)

Invol. Attention - Attention due to the chs. of the stimulus.

Habitual Attention - When attention takes place due to the interest of the individual and chs. of the stimulus.